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SUBJECT: FOURTH URN UPDATE: PRESIDENT ZELAYA ORDERS ARMED FORCES TO SUPPORT

Ref: A. Tegucigalpa 395

[1](#)B. Tegucigalpa 380 and previous

The entire text is Sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet distribution.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya interrupted regularly-scheduled programming on May 29 to declare that the public opinion poll to canvass support for the addition of a Fourth Urn on the holding of a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution set for June 28th would go forward and that he was ordering the Armed Forces to support it. He was flanked by Minister of Defense Edmundo Orellana, who argued that in his legal opinion the order was legal, and Chief of Defense (CHOD) Romeo Vasquez Velasquez, who sat stone-faced and did not make any statements. Meanwhile, public opposition continues to grow, with the various churches and the former CHOD coming out against the initiatives. Human Rights Commissioner Dr. Ramon Custodio denounced that the government is ordering public servants to each obtain 40 signatures in support of the poll, and government Ministers are making the rounds of all the Departments trying to drum up support. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) President Zelaya interrupted regularly-scheduled television programming on May 29 to declare that the decision of the Supreme Court (ref A) declaring the government's proposed poll and Fourth Urn illegal did not apply to the poll currently planned. He and his closest advisors, including Minister of the Presidency Enrique Flores Lanza and Minister of Defense Edmundo Orellana, argued that the latest government decree, which now calls the event a "poll" rather than a "consultation" nullifies the court's decision. Zelaya added that the opinion of the public has more weight than the judge's decision, and criticized public attacks on the idea by adding, "Only in Honduras is it said that a poll is illegal." During the press conference, the President announced Executive decree PCM 027-2009, which "orders" the Armed Forces to support the National Statistical Institute in carrying out a national opinion poll. Orellana, who is a well-known and respected legal mind, then announced that the order was legal and that the Armed Forces would follow the Commander-in-Chief's instructions. Chief of Defense Romeo Vasquez Velasquez sat at the table stone-faced and made no statements, but did not appear pleased.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Meanwhile, political opposition to the President's Fourth Urn proposal continues to grow. The Catholic Church's most respected spokespeople have begun making both direct and indirect comments against the Fourth Urn. Both Tegucigalpa Bishop Darwin

Andino and Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez have made statements saying that the Constitution can only be changed by plebiscite or referendum, not by taking an opinion poll. Pastor Oswaldo Canales, head of the Evangelical Confraternity of Honduras, held a press conference with other Evangelical leaders to express their united opinion that the Supreme Court decision made it clear that the poll and Fourth Urn would violate the constitution. Former Chief of Defense Daniel Lopez Carballo participated in a widely-viewed Sunday evening talk show in which he urged the Armed Forces to disobey an illegal order, and made a call to all retired military officers and military families to support the Armed Forces in doing the right thing.

¶4. (SBU) The government, however, continues to disregard the court order to stop all publicity on the poll, and is maintaining its steady flurry of radio and television ads in support of the poll and Fourth Urn. It is also widely discussed that Ministers have begun to order civil servants outright to support the Fourth Urn. Human Rights Commissioner Dr. Ramon Custodio denounced the government on May 29, releasing a letter that had gone out to all public servants, demanding that each one secure 40 signatures in support of the Fourth Urn. Custodio encouraged public employees to come to his office to denounce any pressure they had received. Many bureaucrats have come out in public to condemn the pressure, saying their supervisors have told them that all travel and vacations for the month of June have been cancelled. Public employees are telling us that they have been assigned to specific areas of the country where they are supposed to go to drum up support and signatures. During one of these government-sponsored trips to Choluteca on May 29, Energy Minister Rixi Moncada was booed by the local inhabitants for

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lobbying for the Fourth Urn. They complained that she was wasting government funds on travel and per diem to promote what has been deemed an illegal poll by the courts.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: President Zelaya has chosen to disregard the court's decision and tried to find a loophole to continue on with his plan for a poll and Fourth Urn. Civilian MOD Orellana is using his legal credentials to support the President's actions, but it is not clear that the rest of the military agrees with his legal conclusions. End Comment.

Llorens